

Living Through Competition and Exploitation Sacred Religion

From the time a baby is born it is suffering, this is why the first thing the infant does after birth is to cry. Inside the womb it was warm and comfortable. Outside it is cold. No one touched it while inside the womb. Now everyone touches. Inside the womb it was not breathing. Now it has to breath. Then it is bombarded with all kinds of lights and terrible noises. This world is almost a hell for the infant.

The infant begins to gradually grow and get used to these new experiences and become a baby that smiles. Soon the baby grows further and becomes a child who can think. This thinking child begins to soon realize its own weakness and insecurity of life and hopes to be secure and strong when grown up. After growing up one begins to realize that the insecurity has become even worse. They have to study, and learn many things, find jobs, get into competitions, deal with difficult people, struggle hard to succeed, and meet many failures and disappointments.

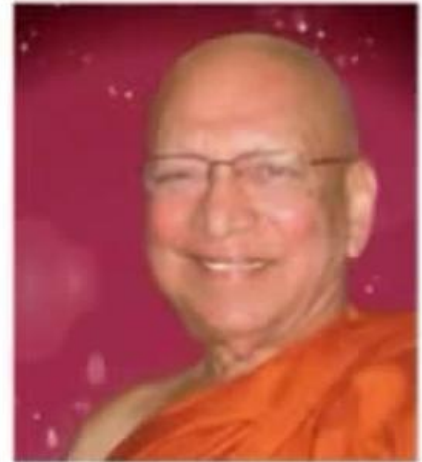
As an adult one struggles to make ends meet, all one's life, till ageing and sickness set in. Things get even worse then. The struggle to survive continues till death.

The first reality that the Buddha pointed to was this insecurity of life. Life is insecure because of the impending, unpredictable death that can come to any individual young or old at any age, and at any time. This insecurity is seen very clearly when we look at the animal world. Every animal has to go in search of food to keep on living. While going in search of food it can become the food of another animal. Each animal lives by making other animals their food. Even the herbivorous animals eat plants, which are trying to keep on living. Human beings also attempt to keep living through competition and exploitation. Each person attempts to live at the expense of others. Even in the normal way of earning a living there is competition and exploitation. If the nature of life is such, there is sufficient reason to question the common belief in a loving Creator God.



BUDDHISM AS A RELIGION

Part 2: *Evolution of Religion*



Ven. Dr M. Punnaaji Maha Thera

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WWW.BHANTEPUNNAJI.COM

So we have been talking about religion as, Buddhism as a religion, and we just started the introduction and today we're going to talk about the Evolution of religion. How religion evolved gradually; we are not talking about Buddhism as such, but we're talking about religion in general, how religion developed.

We said religion was an effort to solve the Problem of Existence. We are looking at it from a humanistic point of view, and we even look at it from the humanistic point of view, instead of the theistic point of view. We see that religion is how the human being gradually began to deal with the Problem of Existence. And the Problem of Existence we discussed was that every human being, not only every human being, all animals, all plants, all living beings; they all grow old, fall sick, and die.

There's a lot of space in front if you like you can come and sit in front.

So the important thing is this Problem of Existence, which is that other animals and plants may not be able to understand this problem properly because some animals are just living unconsciously. It is the human being who can become fully conscious at least to some extent, even that is not the full consciousness, but we are conscious of a World, and we are also conscious of "Self" that is living in the world, and we are also conscious that we are going to grow old, fall sick, and die. Everyone likes to be born or at least the parents like the children to be born, but they have even birthdays and celebrate birthdays, but when they begin to grow old, they are not happy about that, and when they fall sick they're not happy, and when they die they are not happy about that.

So they forget that to be born is to grow old, fall sick, and die, and that is if they don't die early because death can come not only for old people, death can come even for the child just born, and the person can die even before birth in the mother's womb. So you see life is not such a pleasant thing although people think it is pleasant and some people even those who believe that this world was created by a god they thank god for creating them. But if we understand this properly, we won't be thanking god because to be born is to suffer that is the Problem of Existence. And because of the Insecurity of Life, people begin to feel the insecurity. And that insecurity is that you can die at any moment, death is not for only old people, anyone can die, and so that means that is the insecurity.

Now small children when they are feeling the insecurity, they can run to the mother or the father, but when they grow old who is going to be the person to run to, there's no one to run to run to. So what most people do is they create an imaginary person to whom they can run, either they think of the dead grandparents or maybe they think of a god who controls the universe. These are all imagination, and that is they are running from reality into a fantasy. Fantasy is an imaginary thing. So to solve the real problem they're running into an imaginary world, and they speak of having hope.

Hope means an expectation that they're going to heaven after death, and in that heaven there is no death, and there's no unhappiness. So they will be living happily ever after; that means there is eternal life and eternal happiness in heaven. But that is all in the imagination no one has seen this heaven and no one has seen that god. **So it's very important to understand that that is only not the real solution but what is called a placebo.** A placebo is like a pill you take when you are sick just to get the feeling that you have taken some medicine treatment, but it is not a real medicine. So in a similar way this belief can help them to feel secure until they die.

Now the important thing is that the Buddha solved this problem in a different way. He saw that this problem was a psychological problem not a physical problem; that we'll get onto later. But the important thing is that this Problem of Existence, which is the Insecurity of Life, is what started this thing called religion. At the beginning, because the human beings were feeling weak, they were feeling helpless and weak, just like the child, so they wanted strength and power, and they created this imaginary power. That certain words when recited will bring power, or certain rituals when conducted will get power, and that is what is called magic.

So magic is where the human being begins to think of power to control nature or to control circumstances using the magical power that was magic, but of course gradually people began to realize that magical power doesn't really work. So they began to think by trying to control magical powers or using magical powers, they can control the universe or nature. The powers of nature are more powerful than all the magic of the human beings. So therefore the next thing is to become humble and bow down to the control of the Universe called gods. And by bribery and offerings and appeal for help, we might be able to get these supernatural powers to help us, and that humbling themselves to these supernatural powers. That is where religion started.

Religion is where you begin to adjust yourself to fit in to the environmental conditions. Religion and magic are two different things. Magic is trying to show your own power to control the Universe. In religion we show our humility and worship nature or the world or the controllers of the world, the gods. And we begin to adjust ourselves that is religion. But at the beginning it was simply the worship and prayers to these gods; that is the beginning of religion.

But what happened was the human beings began to realize that even after worshiping and making sacrifices still the problems are not solved. So they to think, well maybe because we are bad people behaving badly. So we have to begin to behave in a good way and then pray to the gods then they will help. Because at the beginning people when they realize that you have to be good in order to pray. So they went to a good person; there are among the people there are good people and bad people. So the bad people had to go to a good person and say, after all I'm not such a good person but you are a good person if you pray to the gods, god might help us. So please pray to these gods, and they even give gifts to this good person.

So that good person prayed, and then they thought god will help. So the good people thought, this is a good job for us, these people are coming to me and asking me to pray for them. So I will pray for them and they will give me all the food and everything that I need. So that is the beginning of what is called the priest craft. These people who are good people became the priests, and they were praying for the other people, that is the priest.

But unfortunately even after the priests started praying still the problems are not solved. So what can they do? So they said, well it is true that I don't do any bad things like you, and if I pray if it doesn't work, that means you also have to be good, might being good is not enough. So you have to live a good life, where you don't harm others, you don't steal, you don't commit adultery, you don't lie, you don't use harsh speech, and that sort of thing, then god will help you. So the priests had an answer.

So religion in religion there was this god. Now in a different way, god is not only a supernatural power, god is also a judge, who judges people, who will punish bad people and reward good people. So god the idea of god also began to change you see.

And then gradually, the idea of being good came into religion. At the beginning religion was only prayer to the gods. Now there is what is called morality or good behavior came into religion. And then of course there were good people who prayed to the gods, but still their problems were not answered. Good people also get bad treatment they thought, so they were not satisfied with this being good. So they went and told the priest, yeah I'm a good person, I have not done anything bad, but still my daughter died or my son died or my mother died or my father died and so many things happened to me, why is this? I have been a good person; god is not treating me well. So the priests have to have an answer for this.

So they said, well the only problem is you'll be getting the rewards in the next life; you're getting the rewards in the next life for being good. But if you want to get good results here and now, in that case you'll have to purify your mind, and that means you must begin meditating. So meditation becomes important at that point. And so people began to meditate and even renounce all worldly pleasures, and they began what is called mysticism. This is the mystical stage in religion.

So in all religions you find these different stages, the devotional stage is the first stage, then the moral or ethical stage is the second stage, and the mystical stage, where you begin to meditate, purify your mind. And when you are able to purify your mind, you are able to directly unite with god. You begin to experience the presence of god. And what they called the presence of god was simply that when you purify your mind to a certain level you begin to feel very happy. That happiness that is been experienced when you purify the mind is seen as union with god. And god is not someone that you can see with your eyes or hold with your hands. God is simply an experience, and when you enter that experience you are happy.

So they are now seeing god in another way. And this god is supposed to be indescribable; you can't describe; they have a word for this in English called Ineffable, and this god cannot be described. And also transcendental, that is gone beyond the normal human level, that is transcendental and cannot be seen with our eyes or heard with our ears or smelt with our nose or tasted with the tongue or touched with the body. So with our senses, we cannot perceive god because god is transcendent.

But at the same time god is imminent. Imminent means everywhere. God is everywhere in the world; although, god is transcendent, that is cannot be experienced, but still god is there in the world immanent. You can approach god by praying to the gods. So that kind of way of thinking came from religious mysticism. The mystics began to think of it like that because they were unable to point to god and show god to anyone. You can only experience god when your mind gets purified.

Now the stage beyond this is really what we find in Buddhism, where in Buddhism god can be explained in a rational logical way. And that is god is simply a human concept, a human idea, a human thought. And this thought is the thought of perfection, the idea of perfection: perfect in knowledge, perfect in powers, perfect in goodness. That perfection is simply a human idea, which becomes an ideal.

You know the difference between idea and ideal. Ideal is something that we can realize; it is something to be realized; you know what realize is. Now if you have a check from a bank, saying it is a say million dollars, you have a check for million dollars, but the check is not money. You have to give this check to the bank, and the bank will give you money. It is only when the bank gives money, it has become real money. Until then it is only a check. So getting the money for the check is called realizing the check. So realizing the check means making the check real money.

So in the same way and ideal is an idea in the mind, which has to be realized, it is like a check. And if the god that you are thinking of is only an idea in the mind, it has not been realized; it is only an idea to be realized. And when you realize the idea, then you become perfect in knowledge, perfect in powers, and perfect in goodness. And when you are perfect, you have come to that level. Then you have become god because god is that power; you have realized the idea.

Now this idea some people say, "Oh this is not something that could be realized by a human being; only god is perfect. The human being can never be perfect." But here in Buddhism this becoming perfect in knowledge, powers, and goodness is a potential. You know what the potential is: a power. Now if you study mechanics or physics and things like that, you have a thing called potential energy. What is that potential energy means? It has the power to become real energy; that is the potential energy. Now in the same way, this potency the word is actualized; that potency when it becomes real, it is called being actualized; the potential is actualized when the potential is this ability.

So the Buddhists believe that every human being can some way become a Buddha. What is that? That means the human being has this potential to become a Buddha. And that is, there is this ability to become a Buddha. And that means a potential that can be realized. **And when the potential is realized or actualized really, when the potential is actualized, that person is called a Buddha.** So that is what is meant by a Buddha. So when we talk about religion and see how religion progresses, when it comes to the highest point, it is a Buddha. **So when we look at it that way, Buddhism is the most advanced religion in the world.** Now that is how religion evolves gradually.

Now the point is that, this kind of advancement of the human being, up to the point of becoming a Buddha is a process of Evolution. Now this is why we have been saying that Buddhism is a process of Evolution of the human being. Now when we speak of Evolution normally we are speaking of what is called Biological Evolution. Now Biological Evolution is where we think of how the Life began on this Earth. Now when we speak of Life, some people don't know what Life is. We have to understand that what we call Life at least from a biological point of view.

Life is a chemical process. We can call it a Biochemical Process. “Bio” means Life, that chemical released the chemical process. And this chemical process is what is called Metabolism. That word Metabolism comes from somehow Latin or something like that. But still which is really a chemical process going on. And in this process, there are two activities going on. What is called Metabolism is Catabolism and Anabolism, two things.

Now when we speak of anabolism, we are talking about cells being formed because all Organisms whether plants or animals are made up of cells. And the cell of course has something called a nucleus, and it is in this nucleus that there is a special thing called DNA and RNA and things like that if you have heard. These are some kinds of molecules, which carry these processes, which continue that begins to carry these processes called Metabolism.

And especially it builds new molecules. It is a special thing that can build new molecules by absorbing atoms from the surroundings in the form of food and then building new molecules. But these new molecules that are broken, at least some of them will break down and produce at least send energy out. Because when molecules are formed by atoms coming together, you need a certain amount of energy to keep it together. And when it breaks, down the energy is released. And that energy can be used again to build new molecules.

And so the process, two processes that going on at the same time: (1) a building a process and (2) a breaking down process; and both together is what is called Metabolism. So the main thing in what we call Life is this thing called Metabolism. And so this continues, so the continuation of this is what we call Life. And this Charles Darwin who started speaking about Evolution; he saw this process a building up and breaking down, but continuing. But however much we build up, it breaks down. But it doesn't stop there, it builds up again. And it breaks down, but it still breaks and builds up.

So this process is what Charles Darwin saw as the Struggle for Existence. So there is a Struggle to Exist; although, real Existence is not there. Because everything that comes into existence breaks down. So when you're building new molecules, it is only Struggle to Exist, without a real existence there. And this is what kept Evolution going because this process called Metabolism continued. Of course, there were other problems coming up because when the environmental conditions change, even that process cannot be continued. And so sometimes that whole chain of events breaks down and stops.

But still there are some of these Organisms who are able to adapt to the environmental conditions and keep going on. What is called Living; Living means simply continuing this process. And because of this, these Organisms continue to live. But after adaption, so these adaptations, of course, change the nature of these Organisms. And that is how gradually Evolution took place. So we don't have the time to go into the full explanation of Evolution, but the important thing is that there is this thing called Struggle to Exist. But the Struggle to Exist is there but no one really existing.

So what we call Life is simply a Struggle to Exist, without any one existing. But of course Darwin spoke of the survival of the fittest; although, he spoke of survival of the fittest, he was not referring to the survival of an individual. It was the survivor of a generation of individuals.

Now just like Malaysia is a country where there are human beings. Every human being in Malaysia had to die. You don't know of any human being who had not died and kept on living for maybe hundreds and millions of years. No one lived like that. So that means every human being died, but the population of Malaysia gradually increases, why? Because although all the individuals died, the generation continues, so that continuation of the generation is what Darwin referred to as survival of the species, survival; the struggle for existence and the survival of the generation.

So that survival is not a real survival. Every person had to die. But through this Process of Evolution, the human being came in to being. It is through this Process of Evolution that ultimately a human being came in to being. What is this thing called a human being? The human being even before the human being, there were other animals who produce a thing called a brain and the brain was able to control the whole body. But with the coming of the human being, a special kind of brain came up, and that brain was able to think and to reason out. Other brains were not able to do that.

And because of this ability to think and reason out, that brain became conscious, the brain becoming conscious. So what is called Consciousness is not the same thing as Life. Life forces an unconscious process going on. But it is with the coming of the brain, which is also evolved to a great extent, not the ordinary brain. And with this brain with that special part that can do the thinking called the Cerebrum or the Cerebral Cortex. Now that part is able to think and become conscious.

So becoming conscious, first that brain was able to become conscious of a World and a “Self” in it. But after becoming conscious of a World and a “Self”, this human brain was able to understand the world and even make microscopes, telescopes, and even airplanes, and even rockets that go to the moon or maybe even other planets. All that was possible for this brain, which was started unconsciously, now it became conscious, and not only just conscious, it became conscious of the world and how things are happening in the world, and became conscious of a very important principle called Determinism.

Determinism means with the coming of this Determinism, people began to realize that this world is not controlled by invisible spirits. But everything that happens in the world happens only when the Necessary Conditions are present. And when the conditions are present it happens. When the conditions are absent it doesn't happen.

The first problem that human beings had was to, how to set up a fire because if you have the fire they can warm their houses or maybe even produce light, and not only that you can also cook your food. Now in ancient times, people didn't cook food because they didn't know how to make fire. But now you just take a match and strike the match, flame comes up; how did that happen? They study what are the conditions necessary for a flame to arise, and they produced a condition, and then the flame came. And that match, when you strike the match that is what happens. Well even if a child, who doesn't know about Determinism or these conditions necessary for a flame to come up, still can strike the match without knowing anything and still the flame comes up. This is because it has already been made by, whoever scientist or whoever did this.

So the important thing is that this knowledge of this principle called Determinism helped people to even make the airplane, the motor vehicle, even the electric lights, even the electric fan, air conditioning. All these things became possible only because they begin to know this thing called Determinism. So because of this, now the human beings have been able to produce what is called Science. And with Science, we are having all the things, the comforts that we want.

But still there are problems. And Science while it has been doing a lot of things, it has also created a lot of problems, with all the scientific abilities, where the human being has now been able to conquer nature to some extent in that sense. But that conquest is useless because it has created problems. We are now frightened that the universe or the whole earth will come to an end with a nuclear war if it starts a nuclear war. And maybe now they're talking about air pollution and water pollution and talking about ozone layers and all kinds of problems have come up with the coming of science.

So science has not been able to solve the problems. That means the human beings have been trying to use this knowledge of science to conquer the world or the environment. But Evolution took place not by conquering the world but by adapting themselves to the environmental conditions. So this science is not going in that way, not adapting yourself but trying to change the world.

Now there was a person, long before the modern science came up, which came from the Western area in the west the scientists started there. But in India more than 2000 years before that, a person he also came to know this thing called Determinism. **He understood this law that everything happens only when the necessary conditions are present. And he saw that even the human mind that we are thinking of works according to the same law, the Law of Determinism.**

And he used this to change not the world but to change the mind. And thereby he transformed the human being. And when the human being was transformed, what was really done was that in the human being, when we speak of the human mind, the human mind has two parts: thinking part and an emotional part. The emotional part is blind. The thinking part is aware of the world, and that is what we call Consciousness, became conscious, so that this emotional part came before the thinking part.

Now even in other animals you have the emotional part the thinking part is there only for the human being, proper thinking. But in spite of all the science, the emotions are working, and when the emotions begin to work, there is fighting, quarreling because all emotions are self-centered. They are only interested in themselves. So when two people are interested in the same thing what happens? They have to fight. So it is this fighting that creates wars. Now they're not only fighting alone, the fighting is between whole nations: wars. And in these wars they are still using these scientific things. And that is why we are frightened of nuclear wars because if they start using nuclear weapons that will be the end of humanity. You see, this is the problem.

So what does this mean is these emotions are doing this because of these self-centered emotions, which are blind. When the emotions come up, our thinking faculty also goes down. Now they have found that in the brain, there is a part in the brain which works like a switch. That switch controls whether you're going to use the emotional part or whether you're going to use the thinking part. So you can shut down the thinking part and start the emotional part going, or you can shut down the emotional part and get the thinking part start going. So this means that it is possible for us to change this thing that is going on. And that is, that we can get rid of the emotions and start living rationally and intelligently.

And that means if you can do that, the human being has evolved to a high level. **That Evolution up to the high level, where the emotions are completely erased of, and we are having only the thinking part. That is the meaning of becoming a Buddha or an "Arahant".** So that we are trying to do, so you see. The important thing is to do this means we have to train ourselves to be conscious all the time because all emotions are going on unconsciously. It is by becoming conscious that the thinking part begins to work. So instead of being unconscious we have to become conscious. That is what we call learning to meditate. Learning to meditate means we are learning to be conscious all the time.

Now when we begin to meditate, you'll find that you're mind goes in all directions. **It is not the Mind traveling somewhere, but these unconscious habits of thought come and overtake the Mind. It is all coming unconsciously. These are habits of thought that we carry from childhood, not only from childhood, it can come from our past lives also.** So this is why when we begin to meditate, we are training our mind to be conscious all the time. And if we can become conscious all the time, and these other thoughts stop coming, then we'll be acting in the right way all the time. We are not carried away by the emotional impulses. So this needs training. That training is what we call meditation. So that is something very important to understand.

I think we have been speaking about the important things. I hope you understood. Now this is not the first time I am speaking about these things. I have been speaking about this several times, and if you have any questions we can discuss.